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Louisiana's Board of Regents, Colleges and Universities Commended for Teacher Education Reform Efforts

The Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education today had high praise for the work of Commissioner of Higher Education Joseph Savoie and the Louisiana Board of Regents in driving teacher education reform in this state.

"The values of courage and determination are what I am reminded of when I look at what has been accomplished. This is very refreshing and very encouraging. What you are doing is helping us to get kids where we want them to be in terms of raising academic standards," said Paul Pastorek, BESE President.

Commissioner Savoie, Dr. Jeanne Burns, Associate Commissioner for Teacher Education Initiatives - Board of Regents, and Regent Member and Blue Ribbon Commission Co-Chair Frances Henry were on hand this morning at BESE's regular monthly meeting in Baton Rouge to provide an update on the progress of Louisiana's Teacher Education Reform and the Teacher Accountability System in particular. Today's presentation highlighted the radical changes that have occurred in teacher preparation over the last two and a half years in this state through the efforts of the Blue Ribbon Commission.

"Louisiana is blessed to have an environment where the entire education community is working together focused on children and meaningful education reform. We at the Board of Regents have enjoyed our partnership with you and I believe the state is benefitting from the cooperative spirit of both of our boards in addressing these reforms together," Savoie said.

Accomplishments highlighted today include the complete redesign of teacher education programs at all colleges of education in Louisiana, an increase in the statewide passage rates on PRAXIS, the national certification exam for teachers, from 89% in 2001 to 96% in 2003, and an increase in the number of teachers prepared to address Louisiana's critical shortage areas (math, science and special education).

"We are particularly proud of the high number of graduates being produced through our alternative certification programs in critical shortage areas. These figures show that the program is working to attract needed educators in specialized disciplines," Burns said.

Burns also noted the progress made by three teacher education programs to exit “corrective action status” a year early as a result of their efforts to address shortfalls identified in last year’s Teacher Accountability System. BESE’s Board President added his congratulations to the programs for making improvements in such a short time, pointing out that all three programs had taken the bold step of requiring passing the PRAXIS examination for graduation. This year Louisiana had no institution listed as low performing or at risk within the Teacher Education Accountability Report submitted to the federal government.

Board of Regents member Frances Henry, who co-chairs the Blue Ribbon Commission on Teacher Quality, charged in 1999 with formulating a plan for teacher reform in Louisiana, acknowledged the excellent work of BESE, the Board of Regents and the vital support of the Foster Administration in making these reforms successful.

“I’m sure that no one who sat on the original Blue Ribbon Commission could have hoped for any better progress at this point than what we’ve seen so far,” Henry said.

Blue Ribbon co-chair and BESE member Glenny Lee Buquet agreed. “It has been wonderful and exciting. None of us dreamed we’d be where we are today. And I want to add that without the leadership of Commissioner Savoie, who stood before our institutions and said ‘We will improve our colleges of education,’ none of this would have happened so quickly, not even as a result of federal law.”

“The story here is the partnership between K-12 and higher education,” said BESE member Walter Lee. “I think the presence here today of these three people [Savoie, Henry and Burns] speaks volumes.”

The Teacher Education Accountability System grades the progress of Louisiana’s colleges of education in implementing reform efforts. Campus specific reports can be viewed on the Board of Regents website at www.regents.state.la.us.